



Yard Waste is Not Wasted!

Part 2 The Plastic Yard Bag IS a total Waste

Thank you, dear neighbor of mine, for removing 42 bags of yard waste from your yard. You have made us safer for fire season.



But look at all the bags! Let's take a moment to imagine the vast number of plastic bags that we, locals, send to South Tahoe Refuse.

What is *inside* those bags of yard waste won't be wasted. (See Yard Waste is Not Wasted, Part 1) But how about the plastic bags? They get recycled—right?

Wrong. Those plastic bags are a total waste.

Problem 1: The plastic bags often tear. Small bits get mixed into the yard waste and pollute the finished compost with microplastics.

Problem 2: STR does not recycle plastic bags. They can only be recycled at special Store Drop-off locations that specialize in recycling plastic bags. <https://how2recycle.info/sdo>

Why?

1. Plastic bags tangle in recycling facility equipment.
2. Only clean and dry plastic bags can be recycled. Ever.
3. New plastic is cheaper than recycled plastic, so recycling is usually not profitable.

Those plastic bags end up in someone else's "backyard".

Though the plastics industry (the fossil fuel industry) has spent tens of millions of dollars promoting recycling, recycling has never become a viable and cost-effective answer to the plastic garbage problem. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/31/822597631/plastic-wars-three-takeaways-from-the-fight-over-the-future-of-plastics>

Less than 9% <https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data> of plastic waste has ever been recycled and that percentage is falling yearly with the development of more complex plastic products.

Meanwhile, communities have accepted responsibility for this massive disposal problem.

So what DOES happen to those lawn bags?

In our area, they will be trucked (releasing greenhouse gases) to Lockwood Landfill near Reno. An incinerator is being built nearby that will burn our garbage in the future (releasing fossil fuels and other toxins).

Much US plastic waste is shipped (on tankers emitting greenhouse gasses) to southeast Asian countries where unskilled workers laboriously remove the high value plastics (generally #1 and #2) from the mix leaving these third world countries with the final disposal problem. That is one way that plastics end up in our oceans.

You are probably noticing... Regardless of the method, plastic bag disposal pollutes our earth and contributes to climate change.



So, what can you do to contain that yard waste?

1) Dump it at South Tahoe Refuse on one of their Free Clean Green Waste Dump Days, June 27, Sept 5 or Oct 10.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEqF59nvhYI>

2) Use paper or compostable bags instead. They will be composted along with the yard waste.

3) Invest in reusable (some are collapsible) yard bags. Google “environmentally friendly lawn bags” to see some options. Or, use an extra trash can that can be dumped directly into the STR Green Waste Truck.



Please prepare for fire season. Do rake up pine needles over 3 inches deep. Prune away dead branches. But please try to find alternatives to plastic lawn bags.

Finally, to this fun Tahoe Trash Talk episode <https://www.spreaker.com/user/12122858/tahoe-trash-talk-4r> created by STR employee and Tahoe local, Jeanette Tillson, to learn about the different kinds of plastics, their health impacts, recycling potential, and what those triangular recycling codes actually mean. Or visit the STR website or Facebook page for more information.